



Phase II and Phase III Archeological Database and Inventory

Site Number: 18WO23

Site Name: Nassawango Creek

Prehistoric ☒

Other name(s)

Historic ☐

Unknown ☐

Brief Description:

Paleoindian & Early, Middle, & Late Archaic & Late Woodland camp, Early Woodland Adena site

Site Location and Environmental Data:

Latitude 38.2657 Longitude -75.4493

Elevation m Site slope 0-5%

Site setting

-Site Setting restricted

-Lat/Long accurate to within 1 sq. mile, user may need to make slight adjustments in mapping to account for sites near state/county lines or streams

Maryland Archeological Research Unit No. 2

SCS soil & sediment code KsA

Physiographic province Eastern Shore Coastal P

Terrestrial site ☒

Underwater site ☐

Ethnobotany profile available ☐ Maritime site ☐

Nearest Surface Water

Name (if any) Nassawango Creek

Saltwater

Ocean ☐

Estuary/tidal river ☐

Tidewater/marsh ☐

Spring ☐

Minimum distance to water is 15 m

Freshwater

Stream/river ☒

Swamp ☐

Lake or pond ☐

Temporal & Ethnic Contextual Data:

Paleoindian site ☒

Woodland site ☐

Archaic site ☐

MD Adena ☒

Early archaic ☒

Early woodland ☒

Middle archaic ☒

Mid. woodland ☒

Late archaic ☒

Late woodland ☒

Contact period site ☐

ca. 1820 - 1860 ☐

ca. 1630 - 1675 ☐

ca. 1860 - 1900 ☐

ca. 1675 - 1720 ☐

ca. 1900 - 1930 ☐

ca. 1720 - 1780 ☐

Post 1930 ☐

ca. 1780 - 1820 ☐

Unknown historic context ☐

Unknown prehistoric context ☐

Unknown context ☐

Ethnic Associations (historic only)

Native American ☐

Asian American ☐

African American ☐

Unknown ☐

Anglo-American ☐

Other ☐

Hispanic ☐

Y=Confirmed, P=Possible

Site Function Contextual Data:

Historic

Urban/Rural? ☐

Domestic

Homestead ☐

Farmstead ☐

Mansion ☐

Plantation ☐

Row/townhome ☐

Cellar ☐

Privy ☐

Industrial

Mining-related ☐

Quarry-related ☐

Mill ☐

Black/metalsmith ☐

Furnace/forge ☐

Other ☐

Transportation

Canal-related ☐

Road/railroad ☐

Wharf/landing ☐

Maritime-related ☐

Bridge ☐

Ford ☐

Educational

Commercial

Trading post ☐

Store ☐

Tavern/inn ☐

Military

Battlefield ☐

Fortification ☐

Encampment ☐

Townsite

Religious

Church/mtg house ☐

Ch support bldg ☐

Burial area

Cemetery ☐

Sepulchre ☐

Isolated burial ☐

Bldg or foundation

Possible Structure ☐

Post-in-ground ☐

Frame-built ☐

Masonry ☐

Other structure ☐

Slave related

Non-domestic agri

Recreational

Midden/dump ☐

Artifact scatter ☐

Spring or well ☐

Unknown ☐

Other context ☐

Interpretive Sampling Data:

Prehistoric context samples

Soil samples taken ☒

Flotation samples taken ☐

Other samples taken

copper beads - analyzed

Historic context samples

Soil samples taken ☐

Flotation samples taken ☐

Other samples taken



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Diagnostic Artifact Data:

Projectile Point Types		
Clovis	2	
Hardaway-Dalton		
Palmer		
Kirk (notch)		
Kirk (stem)		
Le Croy		
Morrow Mntn	1	
Guilford		
Brewerton	1	
Otter Creek		
Koens-Crispin	2	
Perkiomen		
Susquehanna	1	
Vernon		
Piscataway	1	
Calvert		
Selby Bay	6	
Jacks Rf (notch)		
Jacks Rf (pent)		
Madison/Potomac	10	
Levanna	8	

Prehistoric Sherd Types

Marcey Creek		Popes Creek		Shepard		Keyser	
Dames Qtr	88	Coulbourn	12	Townsend	1293	Yeocomico	
Selden Island		Watson		Minguannan		Monongahela	
Accokeek	18	Mockley	831	Sullivan Cove		Susquehannock	
Wolfe Neck	80	Clemson Island		Shenks Ferry			
Vinette		Page		Moyaone			
				Potomac Cr			

Historic Sherd Types

Earthenware		Ironstone	Staffordshire	Stoneware	
Astbury		Jackfield		English Brown	
Borderware		Mn Mottled		Eng Dry-bodie	
Buckley		North Devon		Nottingham	
Creamware		Pearlware		Rhenish	
				Wt Salt-glazed	

All quantities exact or estimated minimal counts

Other Artifact & Feature Types:

Prehistoric Artifacts		
Flaked stone	5856	
Ground stone	8	
Stone bowls	2	
Fire-cracked rock	10	
Other lithics (all)	5	
Ceramics (all)	4840	
Rimsherds	10	
Other fired clay		
Human remain(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Modified faunal		
Unmod faunal		
Oyster shell		
Floral material		
Uncommon Obj.	2378	
Other		

Prehistoric Features

Mound(s)		Storage/trash pit	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Midden		Burial(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Shell midden		Ossuary	
Postholes/molds		Unknown	
House pattern(s)		Other	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Palisade(s)		dark stain	
Hearth(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		
Lithic reduc area			

Lithic Material

Jasper	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Fer quartzite	<input type="checkbox"/>	Sil sandstone	<input type="checkbox"/>
Chert	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Chalcedony	<input type="checkbox"/>	European flint	<input type="checkbox"/>
Rhyolite	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Ironstone	<input type="checkbox"/>	Basalt	<input type="checkbox"/>
Quartz	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Argilite	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Unknown	<input type="checkbox"/>
Quartzite	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Steatite	<input type="checkbox"/>	Other	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
		Sandstone	<input type="checkbox"/>	slate	

☒ Dated features present at site

Feat. 1 and Feat 6. – Adena burial pits w/ Wolfe Neck sherds, exotics; Feat. 19 – cremation below Feat. 1 & 6 w/ Wolfe Neck sherds, exotics

Historic Artifacts		
Pottery (all)		
Glass (all)		
Architectural		
Furniture		
Arms		
Clothing		
Personal items		
Tobacco related		
Activity item(s)		
Human remain(s)	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Faunal material	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Misc. kitchen		
Floral material	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Misc.		
Other		

Historic Features

Privy/outhouse	<input type="checkbox"/>	Depression/mound	<input type="checkbox"/>	Unknown	<input type="checkbox"/>
Const feature	<input type="checkbox"/>	Burial(s)	<input type="checkbox"/>	Other	<input type="checkbox"/>
Foundation	<input type="checkbox"/>	Well/cistern	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Cellar hole/cellar	<input type="checkbox"/>	Trash pit/dump	<input type="checkbox"/>	Railroad bed	<input type="checkbox"/>
Hearth/chimney	<input type="checkbox"/>	Sheet midden	<input type="checkbox"/>	Earthworks	<input type="checkbox"/>
Postholes/molds	<input type="checkbox"/>	Planting feature	<input type="checkbox"/>	Mill raceway	<input type="checkbox"/>
Paling ditch/fence	<input type="checkbox"/>	Road/walkway	<input type="checkbox"/>	Wheel pit	<input type="checkbox"/>

All quantities exact or estimated minimal counts

Radiocarbon Data:

Sample 1: 2445 +/- 100 years BP

Reliability

SI-2188: charcoal from the fill of Feat. 1 (Adena burial pit) at a depth of 50-60 cmbs, assoc. w/ Wolfe Neck sherds, flakes, ochre, & copper objects

High

Sample 2: 2190 +/- 70 years BP

Reliability

SI-2189: sample from layer of charcoal at 50 cmbs above 2 Adena burials (Feat. 1), assoc. w/ Wolfe Neck sherds, flakes, ochre, & copper objects

High

Sample 3: 2190 +/- 100 years BP

Reliability

SI-2190: charcoal from base of Feat. 6 (Adena burial pit of juvenile), assoc. w/ Wolfe Neck sherds, copper objects, and banded slate gorget

100

Sample 4: 2735 +/- 75 years BP

Reliability

SI-2191: charcoal in Feat. 19 (cremation hearth below Feat. 1 & 6), assoc. w/ Wolfe Neck sherds & Cu beads (date early, but sample from deep in unit)

Mod

Sample 5: +/- years BP

Reliability

Sample 6: +/- years BP

Reliability

Sample 7: +/- years BP

Reliability

Sample 8: +/- years BP

Reliability

Sample 9: +/- years BP

Reliability



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☐ Additional radiocarbon results available



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External Samples/Data:

Collection curated at MAC

☒ Additional raw data may be available online

Summary Description:

The Nassawango Creek Site, 18WO23, is a multi-component prehistoric site with a major exotic mortuary (possibly Adena-related) complex located on a sand ridge along Nassawango Creek in Worcester County. It is situated on the protected lands of the 9,953 acre Nassawango Creek Nature Preserve. It is one of the only sites in the state of Maryland where exotic mortuary goods have been recovered, to be systematically excavated and reasonably well-documented and is, therefore, an extremely important archeological find. The surrounding landscape at the site was wooded until the time of the site's discovery in the 1970s at which point it was being cleared in the hope that it would be purchased for development. Soils at the site are of the well-drained and extremely sandy Galestown series.

The site was first identified in 1973 by two members of the local (Lower Delmarva) chapter of the Archeological Society of Maryland (ASM). These two avocational archeologists noticed prehistoric artifacts and features in an area that had recently been cleared of vegetation and topsoil by bulldozers. In addition to the common utilitarian objects found on most prehistoric archeological sites (flakes, points, and ceramic sherds), the society members also encountered copper beads (a rare find on any site). They immediately contacted the Office of Archeology within the Maryland Geological Survey (now MHT) and MGS staff visited the site and recorded it. In April of 1973, the members of the Lower Delmarva Chapter of ASM began conducting their own salvage operations at the site. Within a short time they had uncovered several features (including burials) and it was realized just how important the site was. Members of the society then requested professional supervision and funds to support an extended field season. Formal investigations under professional supervision were undertaken in July and August of 1973 and were equivalent to a full-scale Phase III data recovery project.

Excavation began with the establishment of a 2 meter mapping grid across the entire site area (estimated to be approximately 122 meters X 76 meters). A total of 31 units were laid out and excavated. Most units were terminated at a depth of approximately 30 cm below the cleared surface (an estimated 20 cm may have been removed by construction crews). This tended to be the maximum depth at which any artifacts were being recovered, with the exception of some of the features encountered which contained artifacts and extended as deep as 50 cm. In addition to the thirty-one 2 X 2 meter units, two small extensions beyond unit walls were established to explore features encountered within two of the test units. All excavated soils were screened through hardware cloth. In the vast majority of units a standard ¼ inch mesh hardware cloth was used, but in some circumstances 3/8 inch mesh and 1/8 inch mesh were also used (the latter more frequently used in excavated features). Some soil samples were also collected from features for flotation or other analysis. However, the only flotation results available in MHT site files provided no useful interpretive data. Conserved samples may be available at the MAC lab. From the outset of fieldwork, the extremely sandy soil hampered excavation. Wall collapse was a constant problem and it was difficult to discern changes in soil color, section features, and pedestal artifacts.

A total of 24 features were encountered during the 1973 excavations. The description of features below does not match up with the data provided in a short 1973 summary by the Project PI. The feature description provided in the PI's summary report is not supported by the extant field records or correspondence records relating to the site. Thus, in this case it has been deemed necessary to rely on the field records to generate this synopsis report. The features included 5 hearths (4 of which may have been utilized for processing ochre from local bog iron), 2 burial pits, 2 cremation hearths, 2 apparent refuse pits, and 5 anomalous orange soil stains (1 of which had postmolds cutting through it). In addition, one feature turned out to be a probable continuation of a previously identified feature, and a total of 7 features were determined to be tree/stump features of natural origin. In the description that follows, features are not presented in order by feature number, but are ordered geographically from north to south (generally) to provide some sense of the physical layout of the site.

The densest cluster of features was situated at the north end of 18WO23 and included the two major burial pits at the site. Feature 1 was a large burial pit with pockets of burnt or ashy soil containing cremated bone, chunks of red ochre, lithic flakes, Wolfe Neck ceramic sherds, and loose copper beads. The pit was subdivided into Subfeatures 1a, 1b, and 1c and also contained within it Burials 2 and 3. Both Burials 2 and 3 were encountered at a depth of approximately 50 cm below the surface, beneath a layer of charcoal that was sampled for radiocarbon dating (see below). Burial 2 consisted of the in-flesh burial of a juvenile along with a "cache" of exotic grave goods. The grave goods were subsequently assigned Subfeature number 1c and included a perforated copper pendant and strands of hundreds of copper beads. Burial 3 consisted of a pocket of cremated bone embedded within a deposit of reddish soil. Two other pieces of cremated bone were found nearby (just south of Burial 3) and were designated Subfeatures 1a and 1b. Additional charcoal was encountered in the fill of Feature 1 at the 50-60 cm depth and a second sample (presumably taken from below the sample at 50cm) was taken for dating. The charcoal from 50 cm in depth (just above the burials) returned an uncalibrated date of $2,190 \pm 70$ radiocarbon years before present, while the charcoal taken between 50 and 60 cm depth (in the fill) was dated to $2,445 \pm 100$ radiocarbon years. When calibrated (2 sigma), these dates correspond to 392-89 BC and 804-374 BC respectively.

Feature 6 was situated just south of Feature 1 and was a large bowl-shaped burial pit containing dark ashy soil, Wolfe Neck sherds, cremated bones, and a second in-flesh burial (Burial 4). Burial 4 consisted of the remains of a juvenile estimated to be between 4 and 7 years in age, along with several grave offerings. Portions of the jaw and skull and an articulated rib cage were present along with several strands of copper beads (hundreds total), several loose beads, and a broken banded slate gorget. Fragments of fabric were also preserved beneath the remains by the actions of copper salts. In addition to Burial 4, Burial 1 was also situated within this pit (Feature 6). This burial consisted of a concentration of cremated remains along with a copper paint/pigment cup (designated Subfeature 6b). A dark stain also passed through Feature 6 and intruded into some of the adjacent features. This stain was designated Subfeature 6a and was interpreted as possibly being a recent disturbance. Charcoal was recovered from near the base of Feature 6 at a depth of between 90 and 100 cm and was, again, submitted for C-14 dating. The specimen returned an uncalibrated date of $2,190 \pm 100$ radiocarbon years before present. The calibrated 2-sigma calendrical date range corresponds to the years 413 BC – AD 29.

Situated somewhat between the two features (north-south), but above Feature 6, was Feature 4. Feature 4 was a basin-shaped depression containing dark earth and charcoal, along with some red ochre. It is thought that this hearth feature may have been utilized to process local bog iron into red ochre. Bog iron deposits are extensive throughout the area and forges actually operated in the area in historic times to produce cast and pig iron. Feature 9 was situated in the same general position, and was interpreted as likely being a simple continuation of Feature 4 into deeper soils. Deeply buried beneath this burial cluster, Feature 19 was encountered. Feature 19 was a deep bowl-shaped cremation pit/hearth. It contained concentrations of cremated human bone and teeth in ashy soil along with a few copper beads, Wolfe Neck pottery sherds, and charcoal. The charcoal was submitted for radiocarbon dating and yielded an uncalibrated date of $2,735 \pm 75$ radiocarbon years before present. This translates to a calendrical date of between 1056 and 789 BC once calibrated. A couple of meters to the north of this tight cluster of features (1, 6, 4, & 9), was Feature 18. Feature 18 consisted of a dark black stained area with a concentration of eroded pottery and some bone fragments. It is probably some type of refuse pit. On both the east and west sides of the cluster containing the burial pits, were



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Unknown ☐

orange soil stains. Feature 7 was a large oval-shaped orange stain less than a meter east of Feature 6. Within the larger stain were six postmolds laid out in a shallow arc. A seventh postmold was situated just beyond the orange stain. The postmolds were recorded collectively as Subfeature 7a of Feature 7. Feature 8 was a second orange stain detected in the wall of a unit established to excavate the western half of Feature 6.

Features 3, 5, 10, 11, 12, and 15 were situated in a cluster between 4 and 6 meters south of the burial pit cluster. All six features were determined to be tree/stump stains. However, Feature 5 was slightly difficult to interpret. Ultimately it was decided that this was likely a tree root as well, but a hammerstone was recovered from the feature fill and, thus, the interpretation is tentative. Between the tree cluster and the burial pit cluster to the north, was Feature 17. Feature 17 appeared to be a hearth. It consisted of a dark orange stain containing quantities of burnt bone, charcoal, and lithic flakes. Just south of this (on the northern edge of the tree cluster) was Feature 13. The feature appeared at a depth of approximately 60 cm and consisted of a circular orange stain in the surrounding yellow sand matrix. Feature 2 was in the midst of the tree cluster and consisted of a shallow, basin-shaped depression containing cremated bone, charcoal, and burned earth. It likely served as a cremation hearth, although it is uncertain whether the bones are indeed human. Feature 16 was situated at the southern edge of the tree cluster and primarily below it. This consisted of another orange soil stain of circular form. A few meters to the southwest was another such stain. It was heavily disturbed and more oval in shape, containing an orangish-grey soil. Yet another tree stain (Feature 14) was encountered just a few meters south of Feature 16, somewhat isolated from the others.

Feature 21 was isolated from any other feature, located several meters south of Feature 14. Feature 21 was an apparent hearth. It consisted of a small round feature containing a lot of burned ochre and hematite, charcoal, and bone. Another cluster of features was situated several meters to the southwest of Feature 21. Feature 22 was encountered at the 10-20 cm level. This was an oval-shaped stain feature with a rhyolite Fox Creek (or Selby Bay) point just above it and with a red jasper Meadowood point, an argillite drill, a rose quartz knife, lithic flakes, and bone within the feature. It is interpreted as a second refuse pit. Features 23 and 24 were just to the east. Feature 23 was a shallow bowl-shaped hearth depression that was circular in outline and stained with quantities of ochre. Near its center was a concentration of red ochre situated atop charcoal. Feature 24 was much the same in general shape and size, but without the dense concentration of charcoal and ochre near the center.

Late in the summer of 1973, after formal excavations had ended, some of the ASM volunteers returned to the site with a metal detector and obtained strong anomaly readings along the southeast side of the ridge. They removed the topsoil and noted the presence of large red ochre stains, but quickly covered them back over and reported the find to MGS. Throughout the excavations in the summer of 1973 and in the months and years immediately following, vandalism and pot-hunting were a frequent problem. Several vandals' pits were reported on the ridgetop. Fortunately, local ASM chapter members were able to monitor Site 18WO23 and respond quickly to backfill looters' pits. The knowledge that the site was being monitored eventually led to a decline in such activity as did the return of colonizing plant species once work was no longer taking place. From the correspondence files archived by MHT, it appears that many of the pits were devoid of artifacts anyway and may have actually been sand barrow pits. In the fall of 1973, when this vandalism was at its peak, the project PI and some volunteers returned to the site to excavate in the area of the metal detector anomalies. They uncovered only very shallow deposits of red ochre with no artifacts or human bones present. The metal detector reaction was likely due to the iron in the ochre. Nothing further is known about the excavations in the vicinity of these anomalies.

The only other documented archeological attention that the site has received (aside from some surface collecting throughout the 1970s), was the excavation of 3 additional 2 X 2 meter test units excavated by ASM members in the summer of 1974. These adjacent units were in the central portion of the site, at the crest of the ridge and were tied into the site grid established the previous year. Few details are reported from these excavations, but at least 4 more features were encountered (Features 25-28). Fire-cracked rock was noted in all three units along with other artifacts, a number of which point to much earlier occupations at 18WO23. In the easternmost of the three units, several biface fragments, flakes, fire-cracked rock, shell, burnt bone, and pottery sherds were excavated. Among the ceramics that were identifiable in this unit were Townsend, Mockley, and Wolfe Neck sherds. In the adjacent unit to the west were a Lamoka point, 2 possible Koens-Crispin points, other biface fragments, flakes, a quartzite nutting stone, fire-cracked rock, shell, charcoal, several unidentified sherds, and fragments of red ochre and hematite. Feature 28 was located in this unit, but none of the material available in the site files identifies what type of feature it was. No description or location whatsoever is available for the other 3 features identified in 1974. In the adjacent unit to the south of Feature 28, were a quartz Clovis point base, a Selby Bay point, a chert drill, an unidentified point tip, a core, several flakes, fire-cracked rock, burnt bone, shell charcoal, and ceramic sherds. Some of the sherds were identified as Townsend ware.

The extant collections from the excavation of the Nassawango Creek site in the 1970s include some 18,091 artifacts representing quite extensive time depth. The Early Woodland Adena and Late Woodland Slaughter Creek occupations appear to be the most well-documented. The lithic assemblage included 125 projectile points (including 2 Clovis, 1 Morrow Mountain, 1 Lamoka, 1 Brewerton, 2 possible Koens-Crispin points, 1 Susquehanna BROADSPEAR, 1 other broadspear, a possible Meadowood point, a Piscataway point, 4 Rossvilles, 6 Selby Bay points, 8 Levanna, and 10 Madison/Potomac points), 52 bifaces, 5 drills, 3 scrapers, 2 gravers, and at least 5,669 pieces of debitage or other flaked objects. Groundstone objects included a grooved axe fragment, a gouge, 2 fragments of a banded slate gorget or pendant, 2 decorated smoking pipe pieces and 2 undecorated smoking pipe pieces. Two pieces of steatite stone bowls were also recovered from the site. Use modified or other lithics include 2 hammerstones, 2 nutting stones, and a netsinker. Fire-cracked rock is mentioned in the field notes, but the quantity is unknown and, thus, the tally in the table above is a bare minimum estimate. Some 4,840 ceramic sherds were excavated at the site. A large number of them are rimsherds, but no count has ever been determined and, again, the tally above is minimal. Reported quantities of diagnostic sherds are 88 Dames Quarter, 18 Accokeek, 80 Wolfe Neck, 12 Coulbourn, 831 Mockley, and 1,293 Townsend Series sherds. A large number of exotic or uncommon objects were also encountered at the site, primarily associated with the Adena burials and cremations. These include at least 388 red ochre fragments, 1,987 tubular and round copper beads, a copper pendant, a copper pigment/paint cup, and a scrap of fabric preserved by the action of the copper salts.

The Nassawango Creek site is a unique archeological resource. Unfortunately, due to circumstances of history, the timing of the excavations in the summer (a winter excavation would have been better in the sandy soils), and poor record-keeping, the site has not received the attention that it deserves. It has the potential to address long-standing questions regarding the Adena occupations on the Delmarva Peninsula and their relation to similar developments in the Midwest Adena "heartland". In addition, the site may provide additional details regarding the Late Woodland Slaughter Creek Phase and it also represents one of the few known Paleoindian occupations of Maryland. Additional research is warranted, however, the extent to which looting has impacted the site is unknown. In addition, given the current political climate surrounding the excavation of human burials, any future excavation will require consultation with local Indian groups/commissions as well as NAGPRA oversight. Perhaps the best option is to make a concerted effort to analyze the site materials and extant records to provide a full and final accounting of the 1973/1974 excavations. Otherwise, the site remains preserved in place on lands held by the Nature Conservancy until such a time as excavation is necessary and practicable.

External Reference Codes (Library ID Numbers):



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